



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** ★★ ★

Healthy Cooking and Eating on a Budget

In 2011, over 50 million Americans were food insecure, meaning they had limited access to food because of household-level economic and social conditions. Information about affordable meal options and cooking techniques can stretch a dollar and help diminish the food insecurity felt by many Americans. Below are five key steps to teaching a healthy cooking and eating class in your community.

1. Identify a Location

Meet food insecurity where it already exists in your community. Find a non-profit, food pantry, school, afterschool program, church, or community gathering space that already provides social services to its participants and ask if you can partner with them to host a healthy cooking class.

- Connect with a local food pantry or food bank that may host weekly community dinners and ask if you can run a class on MLK Day or during that week. Use [Feeding America's Food Bank Locator](#) to find information about a food bank near you.
- Women with infants or children could be greatly impacted by a healthy eating and cooking class that teaches them how to make affordable, nutritious meals. Connect with centers that serve this group such as neighborhood associations, local non-profits, churches, and [WIC \(Women, Infants, and Children\) State Agencies](#) to find out if you can host cooking classes at a center near you.

Let these groups know that you would like to offer classes on healthy cooking and eating on a budget and ask if they will partner with you to offer these classes. This can help to provide both a location for the event and a built-in audience.

2. Organize a Team to Plan

Create a team to plan and promote your nutrition event at your host site as well as throughout the community. A successful group effort requires a motivated team that agrees upon clearly defined tasks, sets reachable goals and acts with inspiration and purpose. Your promotion should target both volunteers who want to run classes as well as community members who want to participate in classes. Some volunteers may need to be trained on nutrition and cooking on a budget.

- Review resources that can assist you in developing a curriculum and/or planning menus for the service project.
 - Visit your local [Cooperative Extension office](#).
 - USDA's Healthy Eating on a Budget tips at: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-on-budget.html>
 - View the online library at www.nutrition.gov for nutrition education resources.

- Partner with organizations like [Share Our Strength](#) to bring a longer-term cooking and nutrition program to your community.
- Use USDA's [Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit](#) or visit www.hungerfreecommunities.org for more resources to address food insecurity at a community level.
- Identify volunteers who already have knowledge around nutrition and shopping on a budget and use them to train others to run classes or serve as assistants.
- Contact a higher education institution with a nutrition, cooking, or biology program in your community and ask if they might have people interested in volunteering or training volunteers about nutrition and cooking on a budget. Also try reaching out to a local chef who is active in the community who might provide his/her services.

Determine what kinds of supplies you will need to host your event and who you can partner with to obtain them. To start, you will need:

- a curriculum that includes food budgeting
- menu
- nutritional information
- recipes
- cooking tools to send home with participants, if you are able to secure in-kind donations.

These items will allow you to engage community organizations in providing financial or in-kind donations for printing/photocopying materials and providing food or cooking tools for your project. Remember to incorporate a way to thank your donors, maybe by adding their logos with a thank you message to the bottom of all materials that you produce yourself such as the agenda for the day.

Once you have set a menu based on the resources above, you will need to secure as many main ingredients for your class as possible through in-kind donations.

- Contact local restaurants and grocery stores or gather basic supplies (pasta, flour, rice, beans, olive oil) through a food drive hosted prior to MLK Day.
- Use the USDA [gleaning toolkit](#) to utilize resources in your community that might otherwise go to waste.

Typical cooking utensils you may want for a healthy cooking class include: plastic cutting boards, knives (for adult classes only), plastic utensils (for children), aprons, plastic gloves, hairnets, slow cookers, serving plates, toothpicks, and more.

- You may also solicit in-kind donations for these supplies.
- After in-kind donations are reviewed, purchase any remaining supplies before the service day so they're ready to go on MLK Day. Make sure that perishable supplies are appropriately stored.
- Set goals for yourselves, such as number of people participating in lessons, number of meals served, number of donated slow cookers, or number of nutritional pamphlets distributed. Also consider goals that might be based on an evaluation or feedback such as number of people reporting increased knowledge about nutrition and eating healthier on a budget, or number of people who said they would use the information they received at home with their families.

- Record these goals, and make sure you can meet them. If needed, revise the goals in a way that will make the whole team feel good about what you accomplish.
- If you anticipate parents bringing children along with them, make sure to plan child friendly activities (possibly even mini-service projects) for kids to do while waiting. Activities might include:
 - Decorating placemats for senior citizen centers
 - Making cards for seniors in assisted living facilities
 - Learning about Dr. King through story books or coloring books
 - Incorporating a [ChooseMyPlate](#) activity. There are activities for [children over age five](#) including a [whole grain lesson](#) and a [whole grain word scramble](#) to test knowledge gained from the lesson. Download a tip sheet of [kid-friendly fruits and veggies](#) and fun ways to prepare these items.
- [Post your project](#) on our site so that people in your area can join your efforts as volunteers or participants.

3. Implement the Service Project/Activities

Prior to the event day:

- Make a site visit in advance of MLK Day to determine how the room will be set up, how you may accommodate an overflow of participants, or adjust the room if fewer participants show up than expected.
 - Consider setting up a registration process to ensure that you know when you have reached capacity for the venue.
 - Will anyone require accommodations to participate? Will you need a sign language interpreter?
 - Also consider having multiple sessions with staggered start times to accommodate more participants.
 - Conduct a run-through of your lesson to assess its effectiveness.

On the day of the event:

- Make sure project leaders or coordinators are at the site early, ready to greet team members as they arrive. Bring team members in early to set up the room, do food preparation such as cleaning, chopping, sorting, or measuring, and to lay out nutritional information.
- Put safety first: hang signs with safety tips around your site and conduct safety training with volunteers and participants.
- Let the lesson begin! As instruction takes place, have trained volunteers circulate the room to help out on a one-on-one basis.
 - You may want to start by talking about buying the ingredients used in preparing the meal on a budget. Let participants know the average cost of food items used in preparing the meal and the total cost of meals as well as nutritional information.
 - At the end of the lesson, incorporate a community meal that brings together volunteers and participants to eat the food that they just made.
 - Send home recipes, informational pamphlets on planning meals on a budget, and if possible, a cooking tool or ingredient to help your participants long after MLK Day.
 - Spread the word about programs that provide food assistance throughout the year or other nutritional projects in which attendees can participate, including:

- [Summer Food Service Programs](#)
- [Community Gardens](#)
- [Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Farmer's Markets](#)
- [Food Banks and Pantries](#)
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)
- Make sure volunteers are assigned to clean-up duty as the lesson progresses to keep the environment sanitary and safe.
- Over the meal, make time for reflection with participants and volunteers. Talk about the parallels and differences between your efforts today to encourage nutritious meals and increase food security and the mission of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to encourage everyone to live up to the purpose and potential of America.
- For youth-friendly reflection and discussion ideas, visit Scholastic's [Spirit of Service curriculum](#) for engaging youth conversation around Dr. King's actions and how they inspire service. (Grades [3-5](#) and [6-8](#))

4. Reflect and Assess

After the project is completed, take some time to assess and reflect on it with your partners. Think about what went well and what could be improved.

- Host an official debrief meeting for team members after the service day.
- Examine the goals you set for yourselves and consider which you met, exceeded, and didn't quite reach.
- Who did your work impact? What did you accomplish? What were your impressions of the day?
- Ask everyone for their honest assessment of what went well and how to improve for next time.
- Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to your community.
- Make a list and plan for any ongoing follow-up.

5. Share Your Story

We know you don't like to brag but...please do! You may inspire others to organize a healthy eating and cooking on a budget class once they hear what you accomplished. [Share your service story](#). We're listening and want to know what you did.